



Vanquishing the Kingdom of Despair

Hope is not a passive reliance upon God; it's a human act of commitment.

by Walter Brueggemann

THIS FALL WE had a reading at church from Jeremiah 32:1-15. This is the narrative in which Jeremiah is mandated by God to buy the family property in a moment when land has almost no value because of an invading, occupying army. In obedience Jeremiah secures the property for a time when “houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in the land,” that is, when peace and economic coherence will again be available. The narrative attests the primary elements of hope for a time of chaotic failure.

Negatively, it is clear that serious hope for the future is not grounded in present data. Indeed, all of Jeremiah’s circumstances tell against any such investment. Hope is an act that primarily contradicts the “facts on the ground.”

Positively, hope in this narrative consists of two ingredients. First, hope is grounded in the deep, *holy intentional purpose of God*. God intends a peaceable, workable economy of houses and fields and vineyards in times to come. Jeremiah is committed to a hope grounded in God’s resolve, at which Jeremiah has arrived with certitude.

But second, hope is not a passive reliance upon God. Hope is a human act of commitment to and investment in the future. Hope is an *act of human courage* that refuses to cherish the present too much or be reduced to despair by present circumstance. Hope is the capacity to relinquish the present for the sake of what is imagined to be a reachable future. In the end, hope is a practice that bets on a vision of the future that is judged to be well beyond present circumstance, even if one does not know how to get from here to there.

The issues are the same for us as they were for ancient Jeremiah. On the one hand, Christian faith affirms that, as Rob Bell asserted, “Love wins!” Without that conviction,

there is no reliable gospel hope.

But that sureness about God’s large resolve is not just an assurance; it is a summons. It is a summons to risky investment that the world thinks is foolish. It follows that now is the time for yielding justice, for foolish forgiveness, for outrageous generosity, for elaborate hospitality. None of these acts can come from fear, anxiety, or despair. But they are all acts that evoke new futures that the fearful think are impossible.

Hope in the end is a contradiction of the dominant version of reality; it subverts the dominant version of fear, anxiety, despair, and violence. The capacity for such contradiction is at the heart of Christian faith. More than that, it is at the root of human well-being, for ourselves as for all our would-be neighbors.

The convergence of *holy resolve* and *human risk-taking* does indeed generate an alternative reality. That has been a mandate for Christians since the beginning of Jesus’ summons to “a conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), and the same mandate has belonged to serious Jews well before us. In the kingdom of despair, there is no trust in holy resolve and no courage for an alternative. At our best, we know otherwise! ■

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A Letter to Those Who Grieve

I will never find the person who took my son’s life, but working against gun violence helped bring healing.

by Cherie Q. Ryans

AS A MOM WHO LOST her son 23 years ago, I want you to know that I feel your pain and we are forever connected. I have been there, and it was not an easy road to travel. But we do get strength at our weakest moments. What has kept me going these 23 years is what I call my mustard seed faith in God, family, and friends, as well as the lovely memories.

Even though my son is not here, his memory is still in my heart. It helps me to talk about my son. It also helps me to